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March 28, 1988

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Dear Mr. Minister:

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In the wake of your highly successful visit to the United States, which has advanced Sino-American relations in a number of areas, I would like to develop further my thoughts on a sensitive and important subject which we discussed while you were in Washington.

You will recall that on the night of your arrival in Washington, General Powell and I expressed our concern over reports that China is providing Saudi Arabia with intermediate range ballistic missiles capable of striking many Middle Eastern countries. We raised this issue in full awareness of the fact that China has important interests in the Middle East and that China is not the only country engaged in arms supply to countries in the region. I appreciate the assurances which you provided that China would not transfer nuclear weapons to any third country, as well as the expanded response provided by Charge Qian Yongnian to Under Secretary Armacost on March 17. We have received assurances from Saudi Arabia that it has not acquired and does not intend to acquire nuclear weapons. We welcome these indications that nuclear weapons have not been introduced into the powder keg of the Middle East and share your view that Saudi Arabia is a force for peace and stability in the region.

Nevertheless, as Under Secretary Armacost discussed with Charge Qian, the United States Government remains greatly concerned over the danger inherent in the introduction into this region, or any region, of a potent new weapons system, with capabilities and range significantly greater than other weapons systems already in the area. The fundamental questions that concern us transcend particular countries or even regions. Of greatest moment are the broader implications for international stability of transfers of this class of weapons. As you know, a number of countries are on the threshold of developing the capability of putting together the technology of ballistic missile systems able to deliver nuclear weapons. Such missiles could also pose a profound threat to civilian populations if armed with chemical warheads.

His Excellency
Wu Xueqian,
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the
People's Republic of China,
Beijing.

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Efforts to develop effective international understandings in this area are relatively recent, and much work remains to be done. In my view this most recent development heightens the urgency of the need for a more effective dialogue between our two countries on this question that could minimize any possibility of misunderstandings that would run counter to our common interest in developing and expanding mutually beneficial cooperation between us.

I am sure you will understand that at a time when the US and USSR -- in a move supported by your government -- have agreed to dismantle intermediate range ballistic missiles on a global basis, the introduction of Chinese intermediate range ballistic missiles into the Middle East has the potential to create serious doubts in the US and elsewhere over China's policies and intentions on the dissemination of such delivery vehicles. An important argument in favor of the zero/zero option was the greater difficulty of establishing credible verification of residual delivery systems as opposed to verification of their total elimination. We are concerned that the proliferation of ballistic missile delivery systems capable of being armed with conventional, chemical, or nuclear warheads could contribute to a climate of uncertainty and help create a more dangerous international environment that would adversely affect the interests of many countries. This could, in turn, detract from the mutual trust and confidence that your visit did so much to enhance.

It is in this spirit that I reaffirm my hope that we can continue the friendly and full exchange of views on this question that we engaged in during your visit, with a view to advancing our mutual objective of avoiding destabilizing developments in the Middle East and elsewhere. I look forward to hearing your views as soon as possible as to how we might best expand our general dialogue on these important matters.

Sincerely yours,



George P. Shultz